E
457
.8
.S92

STRONG

Lincoln

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

Class E432

Book .6

.S32

THE NATION'S SORROW.

A

DISCOURSE

ON THE DEATH OF

ABRAHAM LINCOLN,

DELIVERED IN THE

Larkin Street Presbyterian Church,

San Francisco, April 16th, 1865.

By Rev. J. D. STRONG,
PASTOR.

Published by the Larkin St. Congregation.

SAN FRANCISCO:
GEORGE L. KENNY & CO.
1865.

THE NATION'S SORROW.

A

DISCOURSE

ON THE DEATH OF

ABRAHAM LINCOLN,

DELIVERED IN THE

Larkin Street Presbyterian Church,

San Francisco, April 16th, 1865.

Lincolniana

By Rev. J. D. STRONG,
PASTOR.

Published by the Larkin St. Congregation.

SAN FRANCISCO:
GEORGE L. KENNY & CO.
1865.

E457
.8
.59

DISCOURSE.

"Her gates shall lament and mourn, and she being desolate shall sit upon the ground."—Isaiah 3: 26.

The scene presented by our city to-day is unprecedented in the history of America. Every flag in town drooping at half-mast; every church and public building, and nearly every store and private dwelling, draped in black, and eloquent with grief; faces that had scarcely shown a trace of sentiment for years, flashing or lowering with intense feeling; hard, stern-featured men weeping like women; every voice hushed to a whisper, yet keyed up with a will and resolution which no words can utter; the very air alive and electrical with emotion—all, all make it evident that the hearts of our citizens are touched with sorrow as they have never been touched before. These same sad sights and sounds of woe are everywhere around us. They are seen and heard in all the towns and vine-clad valleys of the State. They are echoed back from our granite hills and snow-capped sierras. They are in all our borders, from the Klamath to the Colorado.

Nor are we, on this distant Pacific slope, alone in our grief. The heart of the wisest, the best, and, prospect-

ively, the most powerful nation the world has ever seen, throbs to-day, like the heart of one man, in every town, and hamlet, and cottage in the land, from the green and flower-clad Coast Range of California to the granite hills of New Hampshire—from the wild woods of Maine to the most southern point where Freedom can find a place for her feet to rest upon. The waves of such sorrow as we have never before known as a nation sweep over us to-day, and over all our people, from the Golden Gate to Massachusetts Bay—from the Great Lakes to the Gulf of Mexico. The civilized world has never exhibited a sublimer spectacle of grief. Nor does history record any other event so important and far-reaching in its consequences, since the assassination of Julius Cæsar, as that which now afflicts our hearts; And even that event is not to be compared with this; for he was slain for subverting the liberties of his country, but our President for defending and perpetuating civil liberty and human freedom for America and the world. Our grief, then, is no common grief; our gates lament and mourn with a sorrow as sublime as our mission and destiny as a nation. We sit upon the ground with a desolation of heart as far-reaching as humanity.

We mourn, first of all, because our head as a nation has been taken away. Abraham Lincoln, as an individual, was the standard-bearer of a party, and as such, in this place, I do not propose to speak of him; but as the President of the United States, he belonged to

every man, woman, and child in the land; and his loss is a national calamity in which all partake—a calamity that reaches even the humblest "mud-sill" of society as well as the tall columns, and strong pillars, and graceful capitals of our social life. Our President is the President of no one section, party, or clique; he belongs to all; he is the embodiment of all the wills and interests in the land; when he is once inaugurated in power, we all own him; we each have a personal relation to him and an individual interest in him. His death, then, cannot and ought not to be regarded in a party light. We are all bereaved; we are all afflicted; we all mourn. At such an hour as this, when the hand of God is on us as a people, no man who is a man can possibly go down and grovel in the gutters of party with the mere politician. As American citizens we stand on an infinitely higher platform; as kings and sovereigns of the land, none of us can so far forget where we are and what we are as to look at our national bereavement from a partisan stand-point; and every one among us, if there be any such, who is so unmindful of his duty and responsibility as one of the rulers and pillars of the Republic, as to feel indifferent, or profess to feel indifferent, at this terrible calamity which has befallen the State, is not worthy to be an American citizen: he has no business in a country like this; he belongs to other regions and other institutions; he is a dangerous element in a Republic, and should be marked and watched as an enemy of humanity and an enemy of God, as well as an enemy of the Government under which he lives. But

few, if any such, I trust, are found among us. Our grief, like our bereavement, is common to us all. We all feel the heavy blow on our hearts; we all lament and mourn; we all sit in the dust and are afflicted. These outward symbols of our grief are but hints and glimpses of what the nation feels—of what we feel—of what every friend of the country and of humanity feels.

Again, we mourn because we are deprived of one on whom, under God, we had leaned for safety in this crisis of our history. During the last four years our situation has been critical. At times we have held our very breath for anxiety. We have looked to the past with wonder and to the future with misgivings too profound for utterance. It has required sagacity, delicacy, and tact far beyond what most of us can comprehend to so shape public sentiment, control the mad passions of the people, and direct their energies, that we could pass through such scenes as we have passed through without the destruction of our free institutions. And now, that the more stormy crisis of our struggle is over, the difficulty and danger of our situation is by no means at an end. The work of reconstructing these dismembered States, of binding up the bleeding wounds of the nation, of winning back the spirit of concord and fraternal love among all sections of the Republic, and of laying new foundations for a purified and rejuvenated Government, now and for the coming ages, as far exceeds in difficulty and importance any thing that is past as the light of the sun exceeds the light of the

little candle that flickers in its beams. And to carry us through these thickening dangers we had leaned on our noble-hearted President with such trust and consciousness of safety as that which a child feels as it rests in the arms of its father. Nor was our confidence a blind, unthinking, unreasoning confidence. We had tried him. We had tried him in the most difficult places. We had proved his sagacity, capability, and honesty. Though we may sometimes have deemed him too slow, in our impatience and hasty zeal, results have shown that he was wiser than we. He has uniformly been safe and reliable. His main fault, if fault he had, as the head of the nation, was his excessive humanity. He has sometimes seemed, to us, to be too yielding, too forbearing, too lenient; yet we have always been able to say of him—what can be said of but few others in such situations—he has never betrayed or deserted a principle. When his positions have finally been taken, he has stood like a shaft of adamant in a stormy ocean, which no howlings of the storm or dashing of the waves could shake. And the longer we have proved him, the greater has been our confidence, till we, and the people generally, have come to feel that he only could guide us safely through the stormy scenes of the next four years. But he is gone, gone from us, and we feel like a lost mariner afloat on an angry ocean without a pilot. Our loss seems to be irreparable. We know not where to look for another to stand in the breach and beat back the hosts of dangers that thicken around our pathway. Therefore are our hearts stricken with grief

unutterable. "We all mourn sore like doves; we look for judgment, but there is none; for salvation, but it is far off from us;" and a wail of sorrow, that pierces the heavens, and will be heard in every valley and mountain glen of the civilized world, goes up to God to-day from every section and hamlet of our land. Civilization has never before witnessed such a scene. Our grief is unparalleled in history.

We mourn to-day, too, because civil liberty and the cause of humanity are still in conflict with such fiendish and barbarous foes. Till our lamented civil war burst upon us like a whirlwind of horrors, we thought our civilization had outgrown the barbarities of earlier ages. We thought that only savages could murder their prisoners in cold blood, and incarcerate them in dens worse than hell, and torture them with filth and starvation more horrible than the Inquisition. We could not believe that American citizens could rival the cannibals of the South Sea Islands, like wild beasts, mutilate the dead, or, like the ancient barbarians of Cythia, slay their enemies, make drinking cups of their skulls, and ornaments for women and children, of their bones. We have read the details of such barbarities with disgust and horror; and, although their truth has been corroborated from a multitude of independent sources, we have been unable still really to believe things so horrible and astounding of any of our fellow-citizens. Even now we can scarcely convince ourselves that any section of the Republic can breed such savages—such devils in

human shape. Yet we can not close our hearts to the fact that this spirit of demons, with which we have struggled for four years, has at last culminated in the terrible crime, which to-day curdles our blood with horror. This murder in cold blood of an innocent unarmed man—the representative and executor of the will of the American people—shows us, as nothing else could, with what we are contending. It shows us that neither we nor our institutions can be safe till such barbarism is weeded out of the Republic, and a higher style of civilization takes its place. It lifts the curtain a little, and gives us a glimpse of our present position, and of the future, and we start back with horror and grief unutterable from the scene thus disclosed before us. How can we enter the path which God seems to have marked out for us? How can we go forward to the accomplishment of our mission as the champions of human rights and human progress? We draw back from the struggle with lamentation and mourning. We sit upon the ground and are desolate in our grief. Oh! that God in mercy would spare us from such a mission! is the language forced to-day from every thinking heart in the land.

We mourn, too, with equal grief, over the injury this crime has inflicted on the cause of Republican liberty among us, and throughout the world. Our enemies will point to it as the culmination of democratic weakness and folly. It will take generations of good order and wise behavior on our part, to wipe out this re-

proach in the estimation of mankind. Our reputation, our democratic principles, our hold on the sympathy of the people throughout the world, have received a blow, in this crime, the consequences of which ages cannot repair. Even our own faith in our institutions is jostled, if not shaken. Our hope, our confidence, our enthusiasm are shocked; and we see our position, as a people, as we have never seen it before. In wandering among the volcanic scenery of the Hawaiian Islands, I have frequently passed over immense caverns, roofed over with a thin crust of lava, where my horse's feet would sometimes slump through, where every foot-fall would roll off in fearful echoes, like subterranean thunder, and where sections of this thin crust of rock had fallen in, disclosing a yawning gulf hundreds, perhaps thousands, of feet in depth. The feelings of the traveler amid such scenes, can only be imagined, not described. Every sound calls to him with a warning cry:

"Turn, mortal, turn; thy danger know;
Where'er thy foot can tread,
The earth rings hollow from below,
And warns thee of her dead."

The feelings inspired by such scenes are just like those we experience to-day. We shudder at the thought of the yawning chasm that may be but a step before us. The dreadful echoes beneath our feet awaken feelings in us that no words of mine can express. We all feel them—we are all startled and aroused—we are all filled with the most painful emotions of grief and solicitude.

And we each feel injured. We are the real sovereigns of the land—each of us is a king, and the President was but the embodiment of us all. The assassin's weapon did not reach him so much as us; the blow was aimed at our hearts; we are the injured party. The loss of a single human life, like the loss of Abraham Lincoln as an individual, is of small consequence. It is not that we mourn to-day; it is the crime committed against the cause of humanity—against the American people—against us, the sovereigns of the land, that fills us with such grief, and shame, and indignation; we feel that the whole fabric of our institutions is shaken, and that all the interests of society are stricken down. It is for this reason, mainly, that we mourn as we do. It is for this reason that our gates lament with bitter weeping, and that there are sights and sounds of woe in every hamlet and dwelling in the land.

But it is God's doings, and we should bow before Him with submissive hearts. He is chastising us for our pride, and folly, and wickedness as a people. We have sinned against him long, and with a high hand. We have eaten up, without remorse, or any feeling of humanity, the native tribes of the land; we have bound fetters of servitude on the limbs of his dear ones; we have tolerated and nursed the most infamous and unrighteous principles, and the most brutal and barbarous passions; we have been puffed up with pride in view of our position; we have forgotten the laws of Him who rules on earth and among men, as

well as among the angels of Heaven, and He is now correcting us for our folly. He is making us feel how we have strayed from the straight and narrow path; He is making us feel that sin in nations, as in individuals, invariably bears a terrible harvest of sorrow. We deserve the chastisement we are receiving; and let us bow humbly before His footstool, acknowledging our errors as a people, repenting from our hearts of the sins that have brought these calamities on us; let us hear the Great Ruler speaking to us to-day, and saying: "The nation that will not serve me shall be destroyed."

Nor should we regard this calamity simply in the light of a punishment. God, undoubtedly, intends it as a lesson to us for the future. And we needed just such a lesson to show us what we are doing, and what is our duty. We are about to lay the foundations of a reconstructed Republic, and there was danger that we should not fully understand the nature of the work we have in hand; there was danger that we should, after all the sufferings, and losses, and bloodshed of the last four years, heal the hurt of the Government slightly; that we should patch up a temporary peace out of discordant and jarring elements; that we should commit again the fatal mistake of our fathers, and lay the foundations of the new Republic on a dangerous compromise with a system of barbarism and oppression, which civilized society has long since outgrown. God evidently designs that we shall have no peace based on such a sacrifice of the republican principle. He means

that we shall have no peace on this continent brought about by the equilibrium of two antagonistic and essentially hostile forms of society. We are warned by the past, that such a peace is a dangerous arrangement, and that its fruit, in the end, is evil, and can be only evil. This is the lesson God is teaching us to-day. This is the lesson He has given us to learn ; and if one calamity will not enforce it on our hearts, there are others in store for us. No one can read the history of the last four years, without seeing that God has a purpose to accomplish by this civil war that devastates our land. We have been slow—exceedingly slow—in reading that purpose, though it has been as plain as the hand-writing on the wall of Belshazzar's banqueting hall. He means that the slave system, and the barbarities necessarily connected with it, shall be wiped out of America, and every event that has transpired during the last four years, serves only to illustrate and enforce that thought on our hearts. The sooner we can understand God's purposes, and get into the current with them, the better it will be for us and for the people ; but if we fight against His purposes, and refuse to hear the voice of His providence, we must still expect just such terrible chastisements as that which so afflicts our hearts to-day.

Let us, then, repent of our sins as a people, and not only repent, but bring forth works meet for repentance. Let us unbind the shackles from the limbs of our oppressed brothers. Let us put down the spirit of inhumanity and barbarism that has so long stalked among

us, the ghost of our murdered principles. Let us lay our foundations for the future on universal freedom, equal rights, Christian civilization, and obedience to law. Let us not entail on our children the evil our fathers have handed down to us; but now, while God gives us the opportunity, let us tear away from our new foundations every antiquated and barbarous principle and usage, and act wisely for this and the coming ages. If we allow ourselves to be thus instructed and guided by God's providence, we shall find that that which seems such a calamity to us to-day is really a blessing in disguise. The first battle of Bull Run was the best thing for us that ever happened in the history of our country. It inspired the nation with a new spirit, and gave shape and character to all the events that have followed in its train; and I believe the assassination of our President is an event of equal significance, and will do a hundred fold more to shape our future than his life could have done, though prolonged to the age of Methusalah. Let us, then, read the lesson aright, and go forward, and God will be with us. He will never leave us, nor forsake us, but will lead us, as He did our fathers, through the fire and through the cloud; and by this terrible baptism of blood He is laying on us, He will wash us from our sins. Even now, from the corpse of our murdered dead, we can hear His voice saying: "Behold, I have refined thee, but not with silver; I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction."

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS
0 012 025 144 2